

NEWS

Outlook: Shortage of resources or lack of political will?

By Rep. Richard Pombo (R-Calif.)

As the global demand for oil rises, some legislators have asserted that we are “running out” of the resource. But, for the foreseeable future, America has no shortage of oil or other traditional energy resources. Washington, D.C., has a shortage of the political will required to let American workers go get it.

While many people make dire predictions about our energy future, they often fail to mention that we are sitting on a wealth of energy resources. The United States has enough non-park federal resources to supply natural gas to 100 million homes for 157 years. But, despite that massive supply, we cannot deliver even one year of affordable natural gas to Americans right now.

The wholesale price of natural gas is 24 percent higher than it was last April, as most non-park resources are off-limits and locked up with more than 30 regulations. We need to increase access to this affordable, reliable domestic energy before we race to build controversial liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals to increase our imports.

The United States has so much coal that we actually export it. So the more electricity a state gets from coal, the cheaper the electricity typically costs in that state. With such a wealth of energy right here at home, it just doesn’t make sense to send our money and national security overseas.

The northern coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge contains a mean estimate of 10.4 billion barrels of oil, according to the most recent United States Geological Survey report. This represents a 45 percent increase in total U.S. proven reserves and could create more than 735,000 U.S. jobs.

And, believe it or not, America is sitting on an oil resource that dwarfs ANWR and the Middle Eastern countries. Studies estimate we can find 2 trillion barrels of oil, four times Saudi Arabia’s resources, in oil shale deposits scattered across the nation.

Oil shale is a rock that, when heated, releases a liquid that can be processed into oil. Its production costs are far cheaper than alternative transportation fuels such as ethanol and biodiesel. New technologies are making this possible.

In fact, new technologies are showing us North America has the resource base to achieve energy independence within 20 years, including conventional and non-conventional natural gas, oil, coal and renewable and alternative energies. We are capable of producing more than 17.2 million barrels of oil per day. My Set America Free (SAFE) Act creates a U.S. commission, represented by experts from Canada, Mexico and the United States, to guide the president and our neighbors to an energy partnership that will free us from our dependence.

Despite all these resources in the United States alone, we have heard an “end is near” cry for more than 75 years. But American ingenuity has always guided us to progress when we allowed it to flourish.

Today is no different. While the strain on global supplies is affecting U.S. energy prices, America does not have to sit at home helpless. Contrary to the claims of special-interest groups, we can produce more energy at home to grow our economy and continue environmental achievements at the same time. What we won't be able to do is conserve our way out of an empty tank of gas.

Congress cannot ignore the growing need for fossil fuels such as coal, oil and natural gas. Even as we move toward more conservation measures and renewable energies, analysts still predict fossil fuels will remain the world's dominant source of energy for at least the next 20 years.

We need to supply this inevitable demand with all forms of energy. But we should not continue our dependence on foreign sources and we should not send \$500 billion overseas every year to import this energy.

We should keep that money at home and put American innovation to work, using the world's most environmentally conscious technology. We can supply the U.S. demand with domestic energy and to create more than 1 million U.S. jobs. But obstructionists in Congress have stood in the way of energy relief and job creation, preventing us from passing an energy bill four times in the past four years. Those tactics are doing nothing to help our energy outlook while we wait for the alternative energies to become reliable and affordable.

We cannot hold off on relief any longer. The average price of a gallon of gasoline rose more than 80 percent since President Bush presented his national energy plan to Congress in 2001. The cost of natural gas to heat America's homes increased nearly 50 percent.

A time will come when our markets create a new, sustainable fuel for the future. Unfortunately, despite our best wishes, that time has not yet arrived. In the meantime, we must put Americans to work producing all forms of energy, especially our abundant fossil fuels.

The question is not whether the United States and our North American neighbors have the resources to guide us to continued prosperity. The question is whether we have the political will to make it happen.

Pombo is Chairman of the House Committee on Resources.